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TAJIKISTAN

SUCCESS STORY

Voices of Peace in Remote Communities

Youth reach out to remote communities along Tajikistan's southern border



Photo: Zuhra Kudratova

Spectators, above, enjoy the performance in southern Tajikistan. Nearly 6,300 people have attended Youth Theater for Peace performances throughout rural regions of Tajikistan since November 2010.

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*–Nurrullo Amrulloev,
Head of the Otchapar
Village Committee*

Nestled amid mountains and winding roads near Tajikistan's border with Afghanistan, Otchapar is one of the world's more remote communities. Populated by less than 20 homes, its residents are ethnic Tajiks and Uzbeks. “Our village has not had any visitors for the past 20 years,” explained Nurrullo Amrulloev, head of the village committee, when receiving a group of youth theater performers from Panj, a town in Tajikistan's south. Through USAID's Youth Theater for Peace program, rural youth and their teachers work with local leaders to prepare performances on specific conflict issues affecting their communities. Youth Theater for Peace drama groups visit neighboring towns to engage residents in a unique theater process where audience members may come on stage, replace an actor and attempt to impact the conflict situation. Nearly 6,300 people have attended Youth Theater for Peace performances in rural regions of Tajikistan since November 2010.

“You are the first group to bring such a program to us, but these performances are good for the development and education of our youth,” said Amrulloev. “We've never heard of a kind of theater where we can speak and say what we think.”

Despite the intensity of the high-altitude sun, nearly 70 residents turned out to explore issues affecting local youth and the stability of their community at Youth Theater for Peace's open air performance. Isolated by distance, mountainous terrain and crumbling Soviet-era roads, small towns like Otchapar often face challenges that are reflective of the larger social currents in Tajikistan and Central Asia. Yet they have limited outlets to discuss and engage on these issues. The Youth Theater for Peace performances in Otchapar touched on family conflict, poverty of opportunity and women's employment, as well as school-imposed child labor.

“Youth Theater for Peace is useful in our communities,” explained one young performer. “Audience members come up to take on our roles, and if the plays we perform didn't address their concerns they wouldn't be able to solve the problems portrayed on stage. They feel as if they are our characters. They cry when we cry, and laugh when we laugh. I understood for myself that we can show the pain of individuals and whole communities.”